

Emergency Preparedness and Special Populations - Community Planning

Public health and emergency response planning requires that you develop a process for working with populations with special needs. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) has distributed a *Special Populations Guide for Local Boards of Health* to assist in the development of this process.

In addition, MDPH has developed the following guidance after meeting with local boards of health and service providers. Your municipality may want to consider utilizing the following approach in order to begin development of your special populations emergency preparedness plan. While this document is being sent to local boards of health, it is suggested that the local board of health partner with another local service/agency (e.g., local police) to begin planning.

1) Hold a meeting with community officials and other community members who may provide direct services and/or communication to special populations in your community. Recommended attendees would include:

- Local Public Health
- Local Fire
- Local Police
- Local Emergency Medical Service (EMS) representative
- Local Council on Aging
- Local Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator
- Local Emergency Management Director
- Long Term Care representative
- Mental Health/Substance Abuse clinic representative
- Local Education Agency representative
- Local refugee/immigrant resettlement agency
- Local Homeless Shelter representative
- Local Community Health Center representative
- Local Hospital representative

(Use the MDPH Special Populations Guide for Local Boards of Health (http://www.mass.gov/dph/bioterrorism/advisorygrps/pdfs/spop_guidance_5_05.pdf) for assistance in constructing an attendee list. The guide also provides a working definition of special populations).

2) Have an open discussion about special populations (who are they, where are they, how to communicate, etc) and emergency preparedness. Discussions may venture into large topics such as city/town evacuation or into specialized areas such as dialysis patients. In order to resolve many of your issues, you will find that your town needs a solid planning foundation. Here is how you can build that foundation:

3) Identify attainable goals to begin and to build upon. Some communities are doing the following:

- Develop a contact list for special population facilities (e.g., Long Term Care facilities¹, group homes², schools, day care centers, etc)
- Assess whether these facilities have emergency preparedness plans in place, whether the facilities are included in the local Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, whether the facilities participate in state/community drills/exercises, etc.
- Have community outreach workers who perform home visits in the community disseminate a Family Disaster Plan and Family Emergency Card to the individuals they serve (One version is available here: http://www.mass.gov/samh/pdfs/dph_family_displan.pdf) They can also disseminate the 9-1-1 Disability Indicator Program information (<http://www.mass.gov/portal/site/massgovportal/menuitem.8df13acb79c731c14db4a11030468a0c/?pageID=eopsterminal&L=5&L0=Home&L1=Crime+Prevention+%26+Personal+Safety&L2=Report+an+Emergency&L3=Enhanced++911&L4=About+E9-1-1&sid=Eeops&b=terminalcontent&f=>). During follow-up visits, outreach workers can ask whether forms were understood/completed/mailed.
- Assess current communication capabilities and methodologies (ethnic media, interpreter/translator, phone trees, community access TV) that would be used to disseminate information to special population facilities and individuals in your community
- Determine how to best collect and manage this information
- Decide if other individuals need to join the committee
- Schedule regular meetings

¹ DPH is currently working with DPH-Center for Health Quality Assurance with respect to emergency preparedness planning and the LTC's they license

² DPH is currently working with DMR and DMH with respect to emergency preparedness planning and the group homes they license

MDPH staff can attend these meetings to share other community ideas, provide information about Commonwealth initiatives, and offer technical assistance.

If you have any questions or would like additional assistance, please contact your Regional Coordinator or Jeff Timperi, Behavioral Health and Special Populations Liaison for the MDPH's Center for Emergency Preparedness at Jeffrey.Timperi@state.ma.us or at 617.624.5275